

In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Interpretation of the Quran- Long version- Surat Al-A'raf (lesson 1-60): Introduction to Surat Al-A'raf

An introduction to Surat Al-A'raf

Dear brothers, this is the first lesson of the interpretation of Surat Al-A'raf. Let me tell you few details about this Noble Surah:

- This Surah is Makkiyyah (it was revealed in Makkah), and it is the longest Makkiyyah Surah.
- In this long Makkiyyah Surah the Prophet's stories are mentioned in considerable details.
- As you know, the Makkiyyah Suwar (plural of Surah) in general focus on the concept of Tawheed (monotheism), which is the essence of faith. It was said, "The best thing the devoted worshippers of Allah the Almighty have ever learnt is Tawheed (monotheism)". Tawheed is to believe that Allah Alone has power over all things, to know for sure that He is the Real Doer of every act and to believe that:

"It is He (Allah) Who is the only Ilah (God to be worshipped) in the heaven and the only Ilah (God to be worshipped) on the earth. And He is the All-Wise, the All-Knower."

(Az-Zukhruf, 84)

To believe in the fact that:

"They have no Wali (Helper, Disposer of affairs, Protector, etc.) other than Him, and He makes none to share in His Decision and His Rule."

(Al-Kahf, 26)

To believe that:

"Whatever of mercy (i.e.of good), Allah may grant to mankind, none can withhold it, and whatever He may withhold, none can grant it thereafter."

(Fatir, 2)

To believe that:

"And to Him return all affairs (for decision). So worship Him (O Muhammad, peace be upon him) and put your trust in Him."

(Hud, 123)

To believe that:

"Surely, His is the Creation and Commandment."

(Al-A'raf, 54)

This Ayah means His Commandment is in absolute conformity with His Creation.

Also, Tawheed is to believe that:

"Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the Wakil (Trustee, Disposer of affairs, Guardian, etc.) over all things."

(Az- Zumar, 62)

The Makkiyyah Suwar originally focus on the concept of Tawheed, because if you only believe that Allah the Almighty is the Creator of this world without believing that He is the Only Deity, your belief will be like the one of pagans who used to worship idols beside Allah:

"We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allah."

(Az-Zumar, 3)

Thus, when you only believe that Allah the Almighty is the Creator of the world, this resembles the pagan's beliefs. In fact, Iblis (Satan) himself believes that Allah the Almighty does exist and that He is the All-Mighty. He said:

"By Your Might,"

(Saad, 81)

Also, he believes that Allah the Almighty is the Creator, as he said:

"You created me"

(Al-A'raf, 12)

Moreover, he believes in the Day of Resurrection. He said:

"Allow me respite till the Day they are raised up (i.e. the Day of Resurrection)."

(Al-A'raf, 14)

This Surah is the longest Makkiyyah one, and it mentions the Prophets' stories in details. Like other Makkiyyah Suwar, it focuses on the concept of Tawheed, which is the essence of faith. When you believe in the Oneness of Allah, you will worship Him devotedly and adhere to His Orders and Prohibitions.

This Noble Surah focuses on resurrection and recompense. Unlike other pillars of Islam, believing in Allah the Almighty and believing in the Last Day are mentioned together in many Ayat. When you believe that Allah the Almighty is with you (by His Knowledge), that He watches you, that He will call you to account on the Day of Reckoning, that He is well-acquainted with all your deeds and that you will be held accountable to be rewarded or punished, you will firmly adhere to His Orders and Prohibitions.

All Makkiyyah Suwar focus on the concept of believing in the Last Day; the Day of Reckoning, the Day of Recompense when all people will be held accountable. On the Day of Resurrection, some people (the believers) will be exalted (will enter Paradise) while others (the disbelievers) will be brought low (will enter Hell). Furthermore,

Makkiyyah Suwar focus on the Revelation; that the Islamic religion was directly revealed from Allah the Almighty. The Divine Inspiration is not related to the Prophet, peace be upon him; the Prophet, peace be upon him, cannot bring it down by his own, nor stop it nor turn it away from himself. Thus, our religion is based on believing in the Oneness of Allah the Almighty and on believing in the Day of Resurrection. Also, it focuses on the Revelation and the Divine Message. Thus, all Makkiyyah Suwar focus on the basic principles of Islam, and the longest one of those Suwar is Surat Al-A'raf.

The inimitability of the Noble Quran in Surat Al-A'raf

Let's discuss another point. In this longest Makkiyyah Surah, there is an indication to the inimitability of the Noble Quran.

1- What does a miracle mean?

Dear brothers, you all know that every Prophet, peace be upon him, was given a miracle, but what does a miracle mean or what is the purpose of miracles? When a person comes to people and says that he is the Messenger of Allah, and that they should follow the Divine Method of dos and don'ts which is revealed to him, the heedless disbelievers who are used to live as they wish without abiding by any condition and without fearing of being held accountable for their deeds will definitely accuse him of lying. Allah the Almighty says:

"And those who disbelieve, say: "You (O Muhammad, peace be upon him) are not a Messenger."

(Ar-Ra'd, 43)

2- Miracles served as testimonies from Allah to the Prophets' honesty

How does Allah the Almighty prove the sincerity and honesty of His Prophets and Messengers, peace be upon them? He supports them with

miracles and extraordinary Signs which none can create except the Creator of the universe.

Some of the Prophets' miracles

1- The miracle of Prophet Musa (Moses) PBUH

Allah the Almighty says:

"Then [Musa (Moses)] threw his stick and behold! It was a serpent, manifest!"

(Al-A'raf, 107)

While the miracle of Prophet Isa (Jesus), peace be upon him, was reviving the dead.

2- The miracle of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) PBUH

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), peace be upon him, was thrown in the fire, but it did not burn him. These miracles are evidences of the honesty of the Prophets, peace be upon them. Allah the Almighty supports His Prophets and Messengers, peace be upon them, with miracles to prove to people that those Men are His Prophets and Messengers, peace be upon them. However, the Prophets and Messengers, peace be upon them, who came before the Prophet, peace be upon him, were sent to their people in particular; every Prophet, peace be upon him, was sent to his own nation only. Allah the Almighty says:

"and to every people there is a guide."

(Ar-Ra'd, 7)

They were supported with tangible miracles. Allah the Almighty says:

"Then [Musa (Moses)] threw his stick and behold! It was a serpent, manifest!* And he drew out his hand, and behold! It was white (with radiance) for the beholders."

(Al-A'raf, 108)

The effect of the tangible miracles looks like the light of the ignited matchstick which goes off soon. Those miracles took place, and after a period of time people may believe them or not, while the Prophet, peace be upon him, was sent to all mankind. Moreover, he, peace be upon him, was sent as a mercy for all mankind. Allah the Almighty says:

"....a mercy for the 'Alamin (mankind, jinns and all that exists)."

(Al-Anbiya', 107)

Accordingly, the miracle of the Prophet, peace be upon him, should not be a tangible one that will turn into a piece of news which some people believe, while others deny, but rather it should be an everlasting and never-ending miracle.

3- The miracle of the Prophet, peace be upon him

The miracle of the Prophet, peace be upon him, is the Noble Quran which includes many aspects of inimitability, the newest one of which is the scientific inimitability. There are about 1300 Ayah in the Noble Quran about up-to date scientific facts. Furthermore, these scientific facts were unknown at the time the Quran was revealed, but they were discovered after 1400 years. For example, before man travelled into space, he had not known anything about it. When an astronaut travelled to the outer space, the minute the spaceship went beyond the earth's atmosphere, he shouted, "We've become blind. We cannot see anything!" This is because in space there is no atmosphere to scatter the light. We find this scientific fact in the following Noble Ayah in which Allah the Almighty says:

"And even if We opened to them a gate from the heaven and they were to continue ascending thereto, * They would surely say: "Our eyes have been (as if) dazzled. Nay, we are a people bewitched."

(Al-Hijr, 14-15)

As for embryology, scientific researchers discovered that it is not the egg which determines the sex of the fetus, but rather the sperm. This fact was mentioned in the Noble Quran 1400 years ago. Allah the Almighty says:

"And that He (Allah) creates the pairs, male and female,* From Nutfah (drops of semen male and female discharges) when it is emitted;"

(An-Najm, 45-46)

Also, it was discovered that everything is composed of atoms which include protons, neutrons and electrons, and they all float in orbits. In fact, everything in this world floats in an orbit; rocks, stones, wood and so on. This fact is mentioned in the following Ayah in which Allah the Almighty says:

"They all float, each in an orbit."

We can speak at length concerning this point, but I will conclude by saying that there are about 1300 Noble Ayah in the Noble Quran in which up-to-date scientific facts are mentioned. This conclusively proves that the One Who created the whole universe is the One Who revealed the Noble Quran.

As I said previously, this Surah includes many indications to the scientific inimitability of the Noble Quran. You believe in Allah the Almighty by your mind when you reflect on the creation of the universe, because the universe is a Divine Sign of Allah's Beautiful Names and

Exalted Attributes (that Allah is the Creator, the Most Great....), and you believe in the Noble Quran when you reflect over its inimitability.

When you board the Boeing 777, which is the world's modernist airplane in the world, and which flies at altitudes above 40. 000 feet, you will sit on fairly comfortable seat, you will feel warm because of the air conditioning system, you will be provided with the best food and beverage services, you can flip through many satellite channels to watch news for example and everything will be fine. Allah the Almighty says:

"And (He has created) horses, mules and donkeys, for you to ride"

(An-Nahl, 8)

The plane you board is not mentioned in this Noble Ayah:

"and as an adornment."

However, when you continue reciting this Noble Ayah you will find that Allah the Almighty says:

"And He creates (other) things of which you have no knowledge."

(An-Nahl, 8)

Your skin shiver when you reflect on this Ayah; aircrafts are included in it:

"And He creates (other) things of which you have no knowledge."

This Ayah encompasses trains, vehicles, hovercrafts and so on.

On a website, I saw a photo of an oily red rose (a Damask rose) with dark red leaves, glossy green leaflets and a blue calyx in the middle. At the bottom of this photo, it was written that this is the photo of the explosion of a star which is 3.000 light-years away from the earth. This star is called Cat's Eye Nebula, and we would spend 50 million years to reach that star with a vehicle. This very star is mentioned in the Noble Quran. Allah the Almighty says:

"Then when the heaven is rent asunder, and it becomes rosy or red like red-oil, or red hide."

(Ar-Rahman, 37)

In Surat Al-Ar'af there is an indication to the inimitability of the Noble Quran through which you definitely believe that the Noble Quran is the Word of Allah the Almighty. Actually, the scientific inimitability of the Noble Quran and Sunnah is the most profound knowledge through which you can refute with certain knowledge, reason, Fitrah and intuition the claims of those who doubt our religion. Thus, the scientific miracles in the Noble Quran are only revealed from the Creator of the universe, and the scientific inimitability of the Noble Quran seems to aim at leading you to believe that it is the Creator of the universe who revealed the Noble Quran.

Surat Al-Ara'f refers to the honoring of man

Let's turn to another point, in Surat Al-Ar'af. There is an indication to the honoring of man. Allah the Almighty says:

"And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with At-Taiyibat (lawful good things), and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preference."

(Al-Isra', 70)

Man is honored. Furthermore, he is created with marked preference.

Allah the Almighty says:

"Truly, We did offer AlAmanah (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty and all the duties which Allah has ordained) to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and

were afraid of it (i.e. afraid of Allah's Torment). But man bore it. Verily, he was unjust (to himself) and ignorant (of its results)."

(Al-Ahzab, 72)

Let me repeat, man is honored, he is the best of all creatures, and he is assigned to adhere to Allah's Orders and Prohibitions. Allah the Almighty says:

"And I (Allah) created not the jinns and humans except they should worship Me (Alone)."

Consider the following definition of worshipping Allah: It is a voluntary act of obedience which is mixed with wholehearted love that is based on certain knowledge and leads to eternal happiness.

Surat Al-Ar'af clarifies the eternal conflict between the truth and falsehood

This Surah indicates that according to Allah's Deep Wisdom, there are right and wrong, believers and disbelievers, people who are kind to others and people who are harmful to others, fair and unfair people and faithful and unfaithful people. These paradoxes or let me say these binary oppositions embrace the conflict between the truth and falsehood. As I always say, had Allah willed, He could have created the other party (the disbelievers) in another planet, continent or era so that there would have been no conflict between the truth and falsehood, but according to Allah's Deep Wisdom, He has made the believers and the disbelievers live together, as well as the people who follow the truth and those who follow falsehood, the people who indulge in the worldly pleasures and those who are concerned about the Hereafter, the people who listen to reason and those who are driven by their lusts and the people who have principles to follow in their life and those who are motivated by their self-interests.

Adam represents the party of the truth, while Satan represents the one of falsehood

Inevitably, there is an everlasting and eternal struggle between the truth and falsehood. Therefore, Allah the Almighty wants us to draw a great lesson from this Noble Surah. Satan represents the party of falsehood, temptation, sin, lust and rejection; he refused to obey Allah the Almighty. On the other hand, Adam, peace be upon him, represents the party of faith, piety, being close to Allah the Almighty and obedience.

Nevertheless, Satan managed to make Adam get out of Paradise by exploiting his naivety and the goodness of his heart. We should learn a great lesson from this incident. Keep in mind that Satan is our bitter enemy, so we should beware of him. This is one of the great meanings of this Noble Surah.

People are divided into three types in Surat Al-A'raf

Consider the following point which is included in this Noble Surah: On the Day of Resurrection, people will be divided into two types; believers and disbelievers. The disbelievers enjoy themselves a lot in the worldly life (they live a sinful life), but they will cry a lot later (in the Hereafter), they will be wretched forever and ever, and they will lose themselves and their families. On the other hand, the believers make every effort to obey Allah the Almighty which is of a tiresome nature. Allah the Almighty says:

"But as for him who feared standing before his Lord, and restrained himself from impure evil desires, and lusts.* Verily, Paradise will be his abode."

(An-Nazi'aat, 40-41)

Those believers abide by Allah's Orders and Prohibitions, and sacrifice everything; the most valueless and the most precious things including themselves, in order to please Him. Therefore, they deserve to enter His Paradise which is described in the following Noble Hadith:

((...a place endowed with such excellent things as no eye has ever seen, nor an ear has ever heard nor a human heart has ever perceived.))

[Al-Bukhari]

The believers act upon Allah's Order, and so they deserve to be admitted to Paradise.

In addition to the believers and the disbeliever, which are referred to in this Surah, there is a third type of people who are exclusively mentioned in it. They are the people of Al-A'raf (a wall between Paradise and Hell on which will be men whose good and evil deeds would be equal in scale). We will discuss this point in details in other lectures insha-Allah.

Surat Al-A'raf includes many Prophets' stories

1-Prophets, peace be upon them, are conveyors of Allah's Message

This Surah is the longest Makkiyyah Surah which shows the high position of the Prophets, peace be upon them. The stories of Prophet Nuh (Noah), Prophet Hud, Prophet Salih, Prophet Lut, Prophet Shu'aib, and Prophet Musa, peace be upon them all, are mentioned in details in this Surah. Also, this Surah shows that the Prophets, peace be upon them, are at the top rank of mankind (with regard to their high morals and best manners), and that Allah the Almighty chose them, out of knowledge, to convey His Message to people through their Aqwal (sayings) and Af'al (actions). Thus, Aqwal, Af'al and Iqrar (approvals) of the Prophet, peace be upon him, are considered parts of Shari'ah (the

Islamic law), because he, peace be upon him, is our good example to follow.

2- Whatever is essential for performing obligatory acts of worship is obligatory

There is an Islamic rule which says that the obligatory act that is not accepted without the performance of another act makes the latter obligatory. For example, no Salah (prayer) is accepted without Wudu (ablution). Therefore, as long as Salah is obligatory, Wudu is obligatory too. Likewise, whatever is essential to perform a Sunnah is Sunnah too. Allah the Almighty says:

"And whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad, peace be upon him) gives you, take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it)"

(Al-Hashr, 7)

We should know what the Prophet, peace be upon him, gave us (the Noble Sunnah) in order to implement this Ayah in our life. Allah the Almighty says:

"And whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad, peace be upon him) gives you, take it,"

Thus, we cannot apply this Ayah in our life unless we know what he, peace be upon him, gave us, because every command in the Noble Quran implies obligation. Also, when something is required for the implementation of an obligatory matter, it becomes obligatory too. Hence, we should all know the Sunnah Al-Qawliyyah (the sayings) of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Allah the Almighty says:

"And whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad, peace be upon him) gives you,"

How could I take it if I do not know what he, peace be upon him, ordered me to do and to avoid?

3- Messengers, peace be upon them, are great examples to mankind

In addition to conveying Allah's Message, the Messengers, peace be upon them, have another mission; Allah the Almighty say:

"a good example to follow"

(Al-Ahzab, 21)

How could we follow the example of the Prophet, peace be upon him, if we do not learn about his transactions, his everyday life; the way he dealt with his wives, his children, his neighbors, his Companions and his brothers in faith, and the way he behaved in the state of peace or war, at the times of affluence and difficulties and at the times when he used to win the war against his enemies or to lose it. Therefore, learning about the biography of the Prophet, peace be upon him, is Fard 'Ayn (an individual duty that is for every Muslim), and that is why the stories of some Noble Prophets, such as Prophet Nuh, Hud, Saleh, Lut, Shu'aib and Musa , peace be upon them all, are mentioned in this Noble Surah.

4- Islamic knowledge is derived from scholars, not only from books

Actually, dear brothers, had man been able to acquire the Islamic knowledge only from books, Allah the Almighty would not have sent Messengers, peace be upon them, to mankind. Similarly, had students been able to learn without teachers, there would have been no need for schools, and it would have been enough for them to buy the school books. However, the Islamic knowledge is only gained from the pious knowledgeable scholars. Therefore, Allah the Almighty sent Messengers, peace be upon them, to guide humankind. The number of the Prophets, peace be upon them, who are mentioned in the Noble Quran is limited, Allah the Almighty says:

"Of some of them We have related to you their story and of some We have not related to you their story,"

I read in some books that the number of the Prophets, peace be upon them, is about some thousands, while the number of the Prophets, peace be upon them, who are mentioned in the Noble Quran is limited.

The main point is that the Prophets, peace be upon them, are role models for all mankind, and they have two missions; to convey the Message of Allah the Almighty to people, and to be a perfect example to them. From my point of view, the mission of being a perfect role model is many times greater than the mission of conveying Allah's Message, because it is very easy to talk about virtues but the real success is to lead a virtuous life. For example, to be patient like the Prophet, peace be upon him, when he met the people of Quraish on the day of opening Makkah. Those people were bitterly hostile towards him for twenty years, they tortured his Companions, fought them, made them suffer a lot, satirized them and inflicted great torture on them. Nevertheless, when he, peace be upon him, was granted victory over them and when he entered Makkah with an army of 10.000 soldiers who were under his control and who were ready to commit genocide against those people if he ordered them to do that, he, peace be upon him, asked the people of Quraish:

(("O people of Quraish! What do you think I will do to you?" They said, "You will do good. You are a noble brother, son of a noble brother." The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "There is no blame upon you. Go, for you are free!"))

[The Sirah (Prophetic Biography), by Ibn Hisham]

This is the real achievement. Also, when the Prophet, peace be upon him, went to At-Ta'if to guide people to the Right Path (to invite them to

Islam), they disbelieved him, made fun of him and ordered their children to throw stones at him.

((The Angel of the Mountains called and greeted me, and then said: "O Muhammad! Order what you wish. If you like, I will cause Al-Akhshabain the two mountains to fall upon them." I said: "No, for I hope that Allah will bring forth from their progeny people who will worship Allah Alone, and none besides Him. O Allah! Guide my people, as they do not know."))

He did not abandon them, but rather he called them his people, he asked Allah to guide them and he made an excuse for them he said that they do not know, and he hoped that Allah the Almighty will raise from among their descendants people who will worship Him Alone, and will not ascribe partners to Him (in worship). Verily, this is the absolute perfection.

Actually, the lessons we learn from the perfect manners of the Noble Messengers and Prophets, peace be upon them, are many times more than what we learn from their sayings. Some scholars said, "The biography of the Prophet, peace be upon him, shows his understanding of the Noble Quran more than his own words", because words can be interpreted in many ways unlike actions as they have only one meaning. This is manifested in the way the Prophet, peace be upon him, treated his neighbors and so on. Thus, this Noble Surah indicates that the Prophets, peace be upon them, are in the highest rank of mankind with regard to their best manners and high morals, and that Allah the Almighty chose them out of knowledge:

"Allah chose Adam, Nuh (Noah), the family of Ibrahim (Abraham) and the family of 'Imran above the 'Alamin (mankind and jinns) (of their times)."

Allah the Almighty chose them out of knowledge.

An example of selling faith for worldly goods

The example of the scholar who sells his faith for worldly goods is mentioned in this Noble Surah. Consider the following illustrating example: Imagine that you found a rectangular white piece of paper on the table and thought that it is of no use or value, so you wrote something on it then threw it into the bin. However, after a while you discovered that this piece of paper was a cheque for 100 billion dollars! You lost all this considerable amount of money when you tore this paper, so how regretful you will be! Likewise, the scholar who puts aside his religious principles in order to gain some benefits, and who sells Allah's Ayat for a little price in order to get closer to the powerful people will be extremely regretful. Imam Ash-Shafi'i said, "I would rather make a living through dancing than making it through selling my faith for money." Allah the Almighty says:

"And had We willed, We would surely have elevated him therewith but he clung to the earth and followed his own vain desire. So his description is the description of a dog: if you drive him away, he lolls his tongue out, or if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls his tongue out."

(Al-A'raf, 176)

Thus, in this Noble Surah there is an indication to the scholar who sells Allah's Ayat (who abandons his faith) for a little price.

Sarat Al-A'raf starts and ends with establishing the principle of Tawheed

Finally, this Surah starts and ends with establishing the principle of Tawheed. It was said, "The best thing the devoted worshippers of Allah have ever learnt is Tawheed (monotheism)". Actually, Tawheed is the utmost outcome of Islamic knowledge, and piety is the utmost outcome of performing righteous deeds. The Message of all Noble Prophets, peace be upon them, can be summarized in few words which are mentioned in the Noble Ayah below:

"And We did not send any Messenger before you (O Muhammad, peace be upon him) but We inspired him (saying): La ilaha illa Ana [none has the right to be worshipped but I (Allah), so worship Me (Alone and none else)."

(Al-Anbiya', 25)

Thus, believing in Tawheed and obeying Allah the Almighty is the very essence of the Islamic religion.

Dear brothers, in the beginning of Surat Al-A'raf, Allah the Almighty says:

"Alif-Lam-Mim-Sad. [These letters are one of the miracles of the Quran and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings]."

Muqata'ah (disjointed) letters that appear in the beginning of some Suwar

Consider the following amazing Hadith in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, said:

((Whoever recites a letter from the Book of Allah, he will be credited with a good deed, and a good deed gets a ten-fold reward. I do not

say that Alif-Lam-Mim is one letter, but Alif is a letter, Lam is a letter and Mim is a letter.))

[At-Tirmidhi and Ad-Darami, by Ibn Mas'ud]

Dear brothers, the unique letter combinations which appear in the beginning of some Suwar differ from other letters; other letters themselves have no real meaning, but rather they get their meaning when they are preceded or followed by other words. For example, the preposition "with" has no real meaning, but when you say, "I eat with a spoon", it gets its meaning through its usage in the sentence. Also, the preposition "from" has no meaning by itself, but when you say, "I travelled from Damascus to Aleppo", it gets its meaning and so on. Thus, the letters have no real meaning by themselves, but rather they become meaningful when they are attached with other words. In contrast, the disjointed letters that appear in the beginning of some Suwar, and which are about 14 letters have meaning by themselves. Although these letters look like other letters that are connected with one another, they are pronounced differently. For example, the Prophet, peace be upon him, recited the first Ayah of Surat Al-Fil as follows:

"Alam (Have you (O Muhammad, peace be upon him,) not) seen how your Lord dealt with the Owners of the Elephant? [The elephant army which came from Yemen under the command of Abrahah Al-Ashram intending to destroy the Ka'bah at Makkah]."

(Al-Fil, 1)

He, peace be upon him, did not say, Alif-lam-Mim, but rather he said, "Alam" (although it consists of the same three letters: Alif, Lam and Mim). Also, he recited the first Ayah of Surat Ash-Sharh as follows:

"Alam (Have We not) opened your breast for you (O Muhammad, peace be upon him)?"

(Ash-Sharh, 1)

However, when it comes to the beginning of Surat Al-Baqarah, he, peace be upon him, recited these letters as follows:

"Alif-Lam-Mim. [These letters are one of the miracles of the Quran and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings]."

(Al-Baqarah, 1)

First, these are Muqata'ah (disjointed) letters. Second, these letters should be pronounced separately; you pronounce Alif with Sukun (a circle-shaped diacritic placed above a letter, which indicates that the consonant to which it is attached is not followed by a vowel), then Lam with Sukun and Mim with Sukun too. Third, these letters should be uttered as separate letters. Thus, these letters are disjointed ones (although they are connected with one another) they should be pronounced with Sukun and they should be uttered separately.

The characteristics of these disjointed letters

1-Allah is the One Who taught the Prophet PBUH how to recite the Noble Quran

In Arabic, letters have names and sounds; for example, the sound of the letter "Kaph" is "k", the sound of the letter "Taa" is "t", the sound of the letter "Baa" is "b" and so on. Thus, each letter has a name according to the semantic Abjads (consonantal alphabets), and each letter makes a special sound as well. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, recited the first Ayah of Surat Ash-Sharh, he said:

"Alam (Have We not) opened your breast for you (O Muhammad, peace be upon him)?"

(Ash-Sharh, 1)

Which means he, peace be upon him, pronounced the sounds of the letters in the word "Alam", but when he recited the beginning of Surat Al-Baqarah, he said:

"Alif-Lam-Mim."

He pronounced the names of these letters.

The most amazing fact is that Prophet, peace be upon him, was illiterate which is considered a legion of honor for him, because Allah the Almighty is the One Who taught him the ultimate knowledge. Unlike the illiteracy of the Prophet, peace be upon him, ours is regarded an affront to us. Thus, as long as the Prophet, peace be upon him, received the Revelation, and as long as Allah the Almighty is the One Who taught him, he is the most knowledgeable person among all scholars. You may get your Ph.D if you study and analyze some Noble Ahadeeth, so how about the Prophet, peace be upon him, who said those Ahadeeth! Thus, the knowledge of all scholars in the world is quite limited when compared to his.

I would like to repeat that Allah the Almighty is the One Who taught the Prophet, peace be upon him, to recite the first Ayah of Surat Ash-Sharh, as well as the first Ayah of Surat Al-Fil as follows:

"Alam (Have We not) opened your breast for you (O Muhammad, peace be upon him)?"

(Ash-Sharh, 1)

"Alam (Have you (O Muhammad, peace be upon him) not) seen how your Lord dealt with the Owners of the Elephant? [The elephant

army which came from Yemen under the command of Abrahah Al-Ashram intending to destroy the Ka'bah at Makkah]."

(Al-Fil, 1)

Also, Allah taught him to recite the beginning of Surat Al-Baqarah as follows:

"Alif-Lam-Mim."

2- A subtle deduction

There is a slight hint in the following Ayah in which Allah the Almighty says:

"And when We have recited it to you [O Muhammad, peace be upon him, through Jibrael (Gabriel)], then follow you its (the Quran's) recital."

(Al-Qiyamah, 18)

It means when Jibrael (Gabriel) recited the Quran to the Prophet, peace be upon him.

Scholars deduced from this Ayah that the recitation of the Noble Quran is only learnt by following the recitation of knowledgeable scholars. The Noble Quran, or more precisely the Ayat of the Noble Quran reached us through Tawatur (a successive narration is one conveyed by narrators so numerous that it is not conceivable that they have agreed upon an untruth thus being accepted as unquestionable in its veracity.) So these Ayat were narrated through successive narration by numerous narrators from the Prophet, peace be upon him who received it from Gabriel who in his turn received it Allah the Almighty. Hence, this Noble Book which is in your hands is exactly the same Quran which was revealed to the Prophet, peace be upon him (there is no omission, addition nor alteration). This fact is a fundamental issue in Islam. Allah the Almighty says:

"Verily We: It is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the Quran) and surely, We will guard it (from corruption)."

3- Muqata'ah (disjoined) letters are half of the Arabic letters

Dear brothers, the Arabic alphabet contains 28 letters, while the disjoined letters which appear at the beginning of some Suwar are 14 letters. They contain half of the phonic characteristics of all letters. According to the science of Tajweed (The word Tajweed is a verbal noun from 'jawwada', which literally means 'to make better'. Tajweed is one of the most prominent sciences of the Quran. It is a science governed by deep-rooted static rules derived from the oral recitation of the Quran by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, after hearing the Revelation from the Angel Gabriel. The applied definition of Tajweed is 'articulating every letter from its articulation point (makhraj) and giving the letter its rights and dues of characteristics (sifat)'), the letters have characteristics like Hams (whisper), Tafkhim (roughness, thickness), Tarqeq (softness, thinness), Safeer (whistle) and so on. Furthermore, some of the Suwar begin with one letter:

"Qaf. By the Glorious Quran."

(Qaf, 1)

"Sad. By the Quran full of reminding."

"Nun. By the pen and what the (angels) write (in the Records of men)."

Other Suwar begin with two of these disjoined letters like the Suwar which start with "Ha-Mim", and other Suwar begin with three of these disjoined letters like:

"Alif-Lam-Mim"

Some Suwar begin with four letters:

"Alif-Lam-Mim-Sad"

(Al-A'raf, 1)

And other Suwar begin with five letters:

"Kaf- Ha-Ya-'Ain-Sad"

(Maryam, 1)

4- The most acceptable meaning of Muqata'ah (disjointed) letters

The most acceptable and the most famous interpretation of these disjointed letters is that Allah Alone knows their full meaning. The other interpretation of these letters is that each letter is the first letter of one of the Beautiful Names of Allah the Almighty. For example, in "Alif-Lam-Mim" Alif is the first letter of the Name Allah, Lam is the first letter of the Name Latif (the Subtly Kind), Mim is the first letter of the Name Mahmud (the Praised) and so on. Other scholars said that it is the first letters of some names of the Prophet, peace be upon him, because in most cases he is addressed in the Ayat which follow these disjointed letters. For example, Allah the Almighty says:

"Ta-Ha"

(Ta-Ha, 1)

Those letters means, "O Prophet, O Taher (pure) from all sins, O Hadi (who guides people) to Allah the Almighty the Knower of the Unseen."

"We have not sent down the Quran unto you (O Muhammad, peace be upon him) to cause you distress,"

(Ta-Ha, 2)

It is most likely that these disjointed letters are the first letters of some names of the Prophet, peace be upon him, because he is addressed in the Ayat which follow them. Other scholars had a logical point of view. They said that Allah the Almighty challenged the people of Quraish by these letters. These letters are the Arabic letters, with which the people of Quraish were familiar, were able to compose words and sentences by

using them. However, they could never ever come up with a Surah or even a single Ayah of the like thereof. Herein the real challenge lies; to be able to compose a single Ayah from these letters. There is another recommended interpretation of these letters which is to say that Allah the Almighty Alone knows the full meaning of these disjointed letters.

Dear brothers, had the prophet, peace be upon him, gave a decisive and final interpretation of the Ayat of the Noble Quran, none would have contemplated them. Thus, even the Prophet, peace be upon him, who is the Master of all mankind, does not know the full and exact meaning of the Noble Quran, as no one knows the reality of Allah's Divine Character except Allah Himself, and no one knows the exact meanings of Allah's Words except Him. Nevertheless, it is permissible for knowledgeable scholars to ponder over Allah's Ayat.

Actually, the interpretation of the Noble Quran is not limited to certain scholars; all the scholars' opinions are acceptable. Accordingly, you can say that Allah the Almighty Alone knows the full meaning of these disjointed letters, that these letters are the first letters of some of the Beautiful Names of Allah the Almighty, that they are the first letters of some names of the Prophet, peace be upon him since he is addressed in the Ayat which follow them or that Allah the Almighty challenges people to come up with a Surah or even a single Ayah of the like thereof.

Other scholars said that the letters Alif-Lam-Mim which some Suwar start with encompass the articulation points of all letters starting with the deepest part of the throat (Alif) to the middle part of the tongue (Lam) and ending with the lips (Mim). Concerning Surat Al-A'raf, which starts with Alif-Lam-Mim-Sad, they said that Sad is added because this Surah is full of the Prophet's stories (stories in Arabic is Qisas, so the letter Sad

stands for this word). Anyway, every scholar can offer his own opinion, and the Noble Quran is inimitable; it encompasses all these opinions so you can choose any interpretation you like.

Dear brothers, next lesson, insha' Allah, we will ponder over the Ayah which follows the one we discussed today.